



## Luther S. Olsen

State Senator

14th District

**TO:** Senate Committee on Workforce Development, Military Affairs & Senior Issues

**FROM:** Senator Luther Olsen

**DATE:** February 8, 2018

**SUBJECT:** Testimony in favor of Senate Bill 746

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Thank you Chairman Testin and the Senate Committee on Workforce Development, Military Affairs & Senior Issues for holding a hearing and allowing me to testify in favor of Senate Bill 746.

Rural Fire and EMS Departments in Wisconsin, like other states, has struggled in recent years with volunteer shortages. States have increasingly offered financial incentives for public safety volunteers, such as tax breaks to help offset costs. These types of incentives might convince existing volunteers to stay around longer — but they probably won't convince new individuals to volunteer.

Senate Bill 746 will expand DWD's existing Career and Technical Education (CTE) Incentive Grant to include a specialized Public Safety Certification Incentive Grant program for high school students. The existing CTE Incentive Grant provides school districts with an incentive payment of up to \$1,000 upon the graduation of a student who receives a certificate in an industry-recognized program in a career with a workforce shortage.

The new Public Safety Certification Incentive Grant will provide a \$500 payment to the student, and a \$1,000 payment from the existing CTE Incentive Grant to the school district, upon the student's successful completion of Firefighter I, Firefighter II or EMT Basic. This will help restock the volunteer fire and EMS worker pipelines by rewarding high school students who earn certain public safety credentials.

This initiative is part of Governor Walker's *2017 Rural Agenda* that focuses on comprehensively addressing the concerns of rural communities.

Thank you, members. I ask for your support and would be more than happy to answer any questions.



# Amy Loudenbeck

REPRESENTING WISCONSIN'S 31<sup>ST</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

**Testimony before Senate Committee on Workforce Development, Military Affairs  
and Senior Issues  
Senate Bill 746  
Rep. Amy Loudenbeck  
February 8, 2018**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and committee members for the opportunity to testify in favor of this bi-partisan legislation, Senate Bill 746. SB 746 will expand the existing Career and Technical Education (CTE) Incentive Grant to include a specialized Public Safety Certification Incentive Grant program for high school students.

Rural Fire and EMS Departments in Wisconsin and other states have struggled in recent years with volunteer shortages.<sup>[1]</sup> States have increasingly offered financial incentives for public safety volunteers, such as tax breaks to help offset costs. However, experts say these types of incentives might convince existing volunteers to stay around longer — but they probably won't convince new individuals to volunteer.<sup>[2]</sup>

In October of 2017, Governor Walker launched his *Rural Agenda* focusing on comprehensively addressing the concerns of rural communities, including investing in workforce and addressing worker shortages<sup>[3]</sup>. As part of the *Rural Agenda*, Governor Walker recommended an initiative to reward high schools and students for successful completion of EMT or Firefighter training.

As you know, the existing CTE Incentive Grant provides school districts with an incentive payment of up to \$1,000 upon the graduation of a student who receives a certificate in an industry-recognized program in a career with a workforce shortage.

SB 746 creates a new Public Safety Certification Incentive Grant which provides a \$500 payment to the student upon the student's successful completion of Firefighter I, Firefighter II or EMT Basic.

The existing "Fast Forward" appropriation of not less than \$3.5 million will be used to fund the incentive grant for the school district and a new sum sufficient appropriation will fund the completion award for students for the 2018-2019 school year.

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<sup>[1]</sup> <https://www.nvfc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/NVFC-Fact-Sheet-2017.pdf>

<sup>[2]</sup> <http://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/blogs/stateline/2017/01/11/volunteer-firehouses-struggle-to-find-recruits>

<sup>[3]</sup> <https://walker.wi.gov/press-releases/governor-walker-announces-rural-agenda-governors-northern-economic-community>



# Amy Loudenbeck

REPRESENTING WISCONSIN'S 31<sup>ST</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

The \$500 award payment to the student will not only incentivize the student but help to offset the cost of the significant commitment both in and out of the classroom that would preclude a student from having a part-time job outside.

SB 746 will help restock the volunteer fire and EMS worker pipelines by rewarding high school students who earn certain public safety credentials. We are proud to work with Governor Walker on this critical issue.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this bill today. I would be happy to answer any questions at this time.



# Wisconsin State Fire Chiefs' Association

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DATE: February 8, 2018  
TO: Committee on Workforce Development, Military Affairs and Senior Issues  
FROM: Wisconsin State Fire Chiefs Association  
RE: Support Senate Bill 746

Thank you Chairman Testin and committee members for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 746. The Wisconsin State Fire Chiefs supports SB 746 and encourage members of the committee to support this bill also.

The fire service in Wisconsin is approximately 85% volunteer and the number of volunteers is shrinking every year. SB 746 will help high school graduates to receive career training and receive financial aid for the career courses in technical college. These career courses will help high school graduates understand the volunteer Fire and EMS opportunities in their communities.

There are several firefighter/paramedic apprenticeship programs that will benefit from SB 746. There are several apprenticeship programs available throughout the southern part of Wisconsin, which provide this training already but the technical college and the students are not receiving the support that SB 746 will provide. The Town of Madison for example recruits high school graduates to join their 3 year student live-in program (apprenticeship). The apprentice lives at the fire station for three years while receiving fire, paramedic and several other specialized certifications while all the time receiving on the street experience. The high school grads accepted need to have basic EMT to get in the apprenticeship. These students at the end of the three year apprenticeship are all hired in career positions.

We believe that SB 746 will help with the shortage of volunteers in the Fire & EMS services across Wisconsin. It will not be the only answer to the shortage of volunteers but it will help our communities recruit and train some volunteers.

Please consider supporting SB 746.

If you have any questions please contact:  
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Scott Walker, Governor  
Ray Allen, Secretary

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**Senate Committee on Workforce Development, Military Affairs, and Senior Issues**  
**Testimony on Senate Bill 746**  
**Andrew Evenson, Policy Advisor, Department of Workforce Development**

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Chairperson Testin and members of the Senate Committee:

I am Andrew Evenson, the Legislative Liaison for the Department of Workforce Development (DWD). On behalf of DWD, I would like to thank you for allowing me to testify in favor of Senate Bill 872.

Rural firefighter and EMT Services report that their volunteer pipeline is running low and their workforce is disproportionately old. DWD is responsible for approving programs that are designated to mitigate workforce shortages in an industry or occupation that is facing workforce shortages. EMT is currently an approved certificate, while firefighter is in the process of being approved. As part of the Rural Agenda, Governor Walker announced a public safety CTE incentive grant to help meet a worker shortage in public safety in the areas of EMTs and firefighters. In the 2016-17 school year, 202 high school students took EMT or Firefighter basic training at Wisconsin Technical College System institutions through Youth Options, Course Options, and standard enrollment. The EMT test can only be taken at age 18, so students typically participate in training right before they turn 18. A firefighter test can be taken as young as 16 with a parent's permission.

Currently, DWD awards Career and Technical Education Incentive (CTE) grants to school districts that in the prior year had pupils graduate with a high school diploma and successfully complete an industry-recognized certification program approved by DWD. The grants are limited to a single grant of \$1,000 per pupil. The amount of these grants has been prorated in recent years due to high demand. 2017 Wisconsin Act 59 increased the amount allocated to CTE to \$3.5 million annually under the Wisconsin Fast Forward program. In 2016-17 school year 4,682 eligible claims were submitted by 270 school districts, leading to an equal distribution of \$640.75 per student. The Department of Public Instruction (DPI) partners with DWD in the process of verification of the certifications.

The legislation before you today, Senate Bill 746 requires DWD to award CTE incentive grants for public safety occupation training in the areas of firefighters, EMTs, or emergency medical services practitioners. Beginning in the 2018-19 school year, the legislation creates a sum sufficient appropriation to provide completion awards to the pupil in the amount of \$500 after student obtains a high school diploma and successfully completes a pupil public safety occupation training program approved by DWD. DWD estimates between 300 and 325 students would qualify, which would cost \$150,000 to \$162,500 in the first year.

The Department of Public Instruction (DPI) would be required to enter in to a memorandum of understanding with DWD to make payments to the school districts and students. DPI currently performs this administrative function as part of the standard CTE program and creates IT savings for DWD from developing duplicative financial systems.

I would be happy to answer any questions you may have. Thank you again for your time and for the opportunity to testify today.